DIDO (*18th century engraving*)

"UPON THE FYRE OF SACRIFYS SHE STERTE
AND WITH HIS SWORD SHE ROOF HER TO THE HERTE"
(*Legend of Good Women*)

CHAPTER IV

THE LIBERTY TO DIE

I. CLASSIC TYPES

With the classical age we pass from the primitive and anonymous to the specific, from the type to the particular. For the first time we can view our phenomenon over a wide and civilized area, and note a fairly coherent response from a large society. Suicide now begins to be the object not only for instinctive reactions but for thought and discussion. Redeemed from odium it is incorporated into reigning philosophies and practised by social paragons.

Broadly speaking, throughout the whole period the primitive and religious forces that create the suicide horror are steadily weakening, or at any rate becoming less vocal. The growth of civilization and the exchange of ideas, though they could not destroy these forces, succeeded in keeping them underground; that is, they confined them to the lower classes. One of the feats of the ancient world is the admirable way in which it moulded religion to suit its social needs; nowhere has the differentiation of religion for the rich and for the poor, for educated and uneducated, been more successfully achieved. While the old polydeistic religion, with the blood horror and the ghost fears that it implied, went on undisturbed below, the upper class adapted its gallery of gods to its philosophic theories and sophisticated outlook. Paganism was taken symbolically and its atavistic paraphernalia, including the suicide fears, were disregarded.

Contemporary with this religious differentiation there was everywhere a loosening and widening of the social unit, and everywhere a growing scope for individual uncertainties and difficulties. From the small city state with its precise recognizable issues, and with its definite authority and specific moral, we move into the almost limitless space of the Roman Empire. There the complication of factors cuts up the easy picture; international philosophies upset local certainties, Rome disturbs the Scythian *morale*, and barbarians come to wear the purple. The imperial mandate and the hexameters of international culture, break up a thousand little microcosms. It is just this loosening of local ties, this weaning from a close parental control, moral or religious, that makes for the increase of suicide. The more the individual has to think for himself, the more he seems prone to commit suicide.

We shall, therefore, both for religious and social reasons, see the practice of suicide growing throughout the age. Only one deterrent, the economic one, increases in strength, coming to a final maturity when the slave system gives way to feudalism in the subsequent period. Apart from the suicide of desperate escape, the socially unimportant expedient of the cornered beast, of which Nero's end is an example, four main types of suicide can be distinguished far more common than the rest. First there is the suicide committed for the sake of honour: in this class we find both the woman who wishes to preserve her chastity, and the Roman who will not fall into the hands of his foes and insists on dying a free man—Lucrece and Brutus. An amusing extension of this idea of dying a free man at all costs is provided by Corellius Rufus, a Roman nobleman. He put off committing suicide throughout the reign of Domitian, saying that he did not wish to die under a tyrant. Once this powerful Emperor was dead he took his own life with an easy mind, and as a free Roman. The second type of suicide is that

committed to avoid the pains and ignominy attendant on disease and old age. This, in practice, often approached closely to the honour suicide; for often the motivating idea behind such deaths was that man, the noble animal of humanism, ought not to allow himself to be reduced to doddering and imbecile old age, or to be subjected to a diseased body: such a state of affairs was not consonant with his honour and dignity. In practice, suicides to avoid the effects of disease and old age were a late development and they only become common with the spread of certain philosophic ideas under the Empire.

The third common type of suicide is that particularly mentioned by Plato: "for human love, for dead wife, for dead son, many a man has gone willingly to the house of Hades, drawn by the hope that in the world beyond they might see and be with those they loved". It is the bereavement type: Paulina attempting to follow Seneca, and Portia taking her life out of sorrow for the death of Brutus. In this category the rareness of "love" suicides and of the suicide pact is remarkable, and it is only to be explained by the status and meaning of love in classical times. There are six suicides in Plutarch's *Five Tragical Histories of Love*, but only one of these is a "love" suicide in our sense of the word. The commoner type is Melissus throwing himself from Neptune's tower in sorrow for the death of his son Actaeon, or Skedasos dying in Sparta to avenge his daughters. Extreme physical passion was, of course, as strong as (possibly stronger than) it is to-day, but leaving out the question of homosexuality, the range of emotions, forces and interests, marshalled under the direction of "love" was infinitely smaller. The conception of the Virgin Mary, the ideas of the troubadours, nineteenth-century romanticism, and perhaps even Queen Elizabeth, have all helped to extend infinitely the dominion of love. The modern does not find it difficult (though one foresees such a difficulty

arising again in the near future) to situate most of his transcendental values, his aspirations, and ideals, in a single woman, or in consecutive women. A simple attraction to the female has been made the vehicle for intensely important and valuable emotions. Naturally when he is "let down" by a woman, she takes so much of his personality that life seems no longer worth living. Many values with which the woman has intrinsically nothing to do are lost by her departure. Thus it is not surprising that suicide should often be the outcome of an unhappy love affair to-day.

To the Greek and Roman, however, a woman was a woman, neither the mother of God, nor the Virgin Queen, and they would have understood with difficulty the sentiments of the nineteenth century, which Browning expressed in the phrase "Love is best". For the ancients there were so many other things to take into consideration; they had not put all their transcendental eggs into one fragile basket.

The question also arises how far the Romans, at any rate, felt the need for transcendental values, and consequently of a vessel to receive them. When the Roman, or the Greek, was deceived in love, he might be unhappy, piqued, hurt or angry, but he rarely suffered that feeling of utter loss and desolation which his modern counterpart knows. Similarly when one of these people married, he might complain that neither his wife's figure nor her temper were as good as he had been led to believe, but he rarely experienced those bitter and terrible deceptions which characterize Christian marriage. Expecting only a certain modicum, there was no room for the disappointments of the soul. The writings of the classics here bear us out; even the passion of Catullus is essentially practical and subject only to rational disappointments and reasonable excitation. Lesbia plays, in fact, an intense but limited role. That love suicides did occur from time to time is indisputable (witness the tragic end of Castor

and Pollux; Hero who drowned herself in the Hellespont, imitating her lover even in the place of her death; Pyramus and Thisbé; and Sappho who threw herself in unrequited love from the suicides' rock at Neritos)[1], but such suicides were rarities, not regular occurrences. They must be distinguished from the typical affection-suicide of which the classic period is as full as any other. The reasons which made Portia commit suicide on the death of Brutus are equally effective to-day. They have not so much to do with love, either in the mystical or the sensual senses of which we have been speaking, as with loyalty, trust, a long habit of affection, and the impossibility of making a drastic and intolerable change in one's way of life at a fairly advanced age.

The fourth type of suicide might almost be classed as ritualistic and sacrificial, since it is the voluntary death of a man who thinks that his own departure will advance his state, cause, party, or family. In practice, however, it is not sacrificial, since the agent does not usually act in an official capacity and may as well be opposing as supporting the *status quo*. This type is essentially classic in character and accounts for some of the noblest and most spectacular deaths of the period.

With the exception of compulsory suicides which we shall consider apart under the classical laws of suicide, most self-destruction in Greek and Roman times can be fitted in under one or the other of these four headings. What is particularly

[1] The origins of the popularity of this rock are not altogether simple. The rock had religious associations. It was crowned originally by a Temple of Apollo where an annual human sacrifice was celebrated. The victim was a condemned criminal who was thrown over the cliff into the sea. The humanity of later ages attached a number of birds to the unfortunate man, whose frantically beating wings helped to break his fall. Boats were stationed below and rowed out to rescue the victim if he had survived. (Raymond Mortimer, MS.; and Delisle de Sales.)

interesting is that two types common to-day—suicide from economic change, and suicide from depression—are extremely rare, too rare in fact to form categories of their own. Menippus, a cynic and pupil of Diogenes, who committed suicide in the first century B.C. on the loss of his fortune is exceptional. Poverty, it seems, only becomes an adequate cause for suicide in a highly developed commercial or capitalistic civilization, where all values are apt to be chained to a money basis, and loss or lack of money means loss of respect, prestige, and a hundred other things. In the small city state riches were rare at the best of times, and Sparta, whose lead currency was elsewhere intentionally valueless, is an extreme example of the disrespect and distrust which could be associated with wealth. With consuls like the farmer Agricola, and Emperors like Marcus Antoninus who, in spite of the tradition of imperial luxury, lived with the greatest frugality, poverty was not likely to be considered an unbearable burden and the poor were not necessarily social outcasts. Even the amassing of large fortunes, such as that of Herodes Atticus, who could afford to present theatres to Athens and Corinth, a racecourse to Delphi, an aqueduct to Olympia, baths to Thermopylae, and a gift to every Athenian citizen, did not altogether alter these ideas. A man's family, functions, and character, could usually discount an empty purse.

Suicide from long depression and melancholia is equally rare. Such depression, though usually physical in root, is fed and fostered by the Christian, and subsequently the romantic, attitude. Life, the vale of tears, caused both by original and acquired sin, the unfortunate prelude to an exclusive paradise, is in direct contrast to the classic idea of the infinite possibilities and unfortunate brevity of a mortal's span. From Homer until the coming of the stoics we get no idea of the burden of life; on the contrary its shortness and desirability are insisted upon. Life and light are op-

posed to the darkness of Hades and to those unfortunate and undignified wraiths who wander there. The dead share no paradise; they long only to pass the styx and regain a pulsing earth. All the portraits of Antinous, the beautiful favourite of Hadrian, are melancholy, and perhaps his otherwise inexplicable suicide in the Nile (which Dio Cassius oddly suggests was a voluntary sacrifice to bring Hadrian good luck) may be attributed to this streak in his character. If so, he stands outside his time and we must list him among the depressed moderns. Hadrian, overwhelmed by his death, deified his memory, raised an altar to him at Athens, and founded the city of Antinoöpolis to perpetuate his memory.

It is interesting that the earliest Greek suicide of which we have mention—the hanging of Jokasta on the discovery that she has been living with her own son and her husband's murderer—is regarded by Homer as a perfectly natural action to which no blame or horror attaches. It appears as the only dignified way out of an intolerable situation. An exit not only dignified, but honourable. No other sacrifice could have absolutely proved her good faith; the taking of her own life is the only real atonement possible. Jokasta is, in fact, the first Greek suicide for honour. As we move on into history proper such suicides multiply. Pantitas, one of the two Spartans who survived Thermopylae, found in suicide the only possible redemption of his reputation and the only adequate answer to those who taunted him with cowardice. A far nobler honour suicide, however, was that of Charondas, the wise law-giver of Catana, one of the Greek colonies in Sicily. He had laid it down for the preservation and peace of the community that anyone entering the public assembly armed should be punished with death. One day, having been outside the limits of the city engaged in cleaning up a band of robbers, he hurriedly returned to make a formal report to the citizens and inad-

vertently entered the assembly without laying aside his weapons. Taxed with breaking his own laws, death seemed to him the only vindication of his position, and he took his life then and there before the assembled people.

Concurrently the idea gained ground that it was not consonant with one's dignity and the way a man should die, to fall alive into the hands of one's enemies. Thus, later in the same century, Thucydides tells us that the oligarchs of Corcyra trapped in the temple of Hera and condemned to die, "destroyed one another in the enclosure of the temple where thy were, except a few who hanged themselves on trees or put an end to their lives in any way they could". Isocrates, the Athenian orator, starved himself to death, at the age of ninety, rather than yield to Philip of Macedon; and a century later Demosthenes took the same way out, to avoid falling into the hands of Antipater, whose ambassador required of the Athenians that they should give up their orators. This, like the ring containing poison which Hannibal always kept for the extremity which at last overtook him in Bithynia, was his only means of personally retaining that liberty on behalf of which he had so long tried to rally the Athenians.

Though suicide as a whole was not as common under the Republic as later under the Empire, in Italy the honour suicide crops up at an early date. The suicide of Lucrece in the sixth century B.C. is a famous and isolated instance. But at least seventy years before her death a regular epidemic of honour suicides had broken out among the Roman soldiery. Many of the latter, forced by Tarquinius Priscus to work at cutting drains and sewers, considered the work servile, beneath their dignity and unconsonant with a soldier's honour; they finally put an end to the situation by pitching themselves off the Capitoline Rock, a spot usually reserved for throwing down criminals. With the beginning of the internecine struggles for mastery

that preceded the Empire, honour suicides become more frequent. After his defeat one of the Gracchi requests his slave to kill him; Brutus, unable to persuade Cleitus and Volumnius to do the same office for him, runs on his own sword.[1] In Pontus, Mithridates involved in the unsavoury expansion of the Roman Empire, and tricked, cheated and beaten by Pompey, takes his own life and that of his family by poison, intent to die a free man rather than adorn another Republican triumph.

Pompey was also involved in the heroic end of the Tribune Vulteius and his cohort. Lucan relates how these men, supporters of Caesar, were cruising down the Illyrian coast in a small vessel, when they suddenly ran into Pompey's fleet. Escape was impossible and the tribune decided to fight rather than yield. All day the solitary vessel defended itself with extraordinary courage, and one attack after another was repulsed. Finally, however, thinned in numbers and wearied by hours of fighting, they saw the situation grow hopeless. It was then that Vulteius called on his soldiers to die by a death of their own choosing, rather than fall alive into the enemy's hands. "Dear comrades," he said, "I have already renounced the light: death touches me and its fury is upon me. No one can know how blissful it is to die until he attains to his last hour. Vulgar men alone, from whom the gods hide themselves, consent to carry a life that is a burden." Moved by his words and finding his advice wise and honourable, the remnant of his cohort took their own lives upon the decks, and none fell into the hands of Pompey. One is inevitably reminded of the story of the *Revenge*, and of Sir Richard Grenville's wish to blow up the boat and sink with all hands. "Having by estimation eight hundred shot of great artillery" through his vessel, he

[1] It is interesting to discover that Brutus, as a young man, wrote a philosophical work proving that it was wrong to take one's own life. The essay was occasioned by the suicide of his uncle.

> commanded the master-gunner, whom he knew to be a most resolute man, to split and sink the ship, that thereby nothing might remain of glory or victory to the Spaniards, . . . and persuaded the company . . . [that] they should not now shorten the honour of their nation by prolonging their own lives for a few hours or a few days.[1]

With the coming of the Empire honour suicides get fewer. Boadicea, on her defeat by Suetonius, took poison to avoid falling into Roman hands, and Cocceius Nerva strikes the old Republican note in the reign of Tiberius. Starving himself to death as a protest against the morals and extravagance of the time, he was determined to die at least with his own integrity unsullied. Not long after, Statius, pardoned by Nero, committed suicide rather than incur the shame of being "spared" by the man who had murdered Agrippa and Britannicus.[2] But such examples are not common, and when they occur have usually a flavour that connects them with the ideas of contemporary philosophy and are therefore treated in another place.

More or less parallel to the honour suicide both in Greece and in Italy, but showing on the contrary a decrease rather than an increase with the passage of time and the complication of events is what we have called the Patriotic suicide. A thousand years before Christ, Codrus, the last of the Athenian kings, sets the pattern. Athens was at war with the Heraclidae and victory had been foretold by an oracle to the

[1] Sir Walter Raleigh.

[2] Strictly speaking, even the pathetic Sporus might be included among the suicides for honour. This young man, owing to his resemblance to Sabina, was publicly married to Nero in Greece. Tigellinus gave the "bride" away and prayers were offered up for legitimate issue. After Nero's death Dio Cassius says that Vitellius "proposed that Sporus should be brought on the stage in the rôle of a maiden being ravished, but he would not endure the shame and committed suicide beforehand."

side whose king fell in battle. Codrus, therefore, sacrificing his own interests to those of his country, entered the enemy camp in disguise, picked a quarrel with a soldier, and allowed himself to be killed. His suicide, as prophesied, brought victory to Athens. Rather similar were the deaths of the beautiful Cratinus and his friend Apollodorus, who offered themselves as sacrifices to wipe out a blood-guilt that lay upon the city. More famous still and more lasting in its results was the example of Lycurgus, almost a contemporary of Codrus. As legislator of Sparta he left Lacaedaemon to consult the Delphic oracle about the new code which he had just drawn up. Before his departure he imposed an oath on the people that they would preserve his laws at any rate "until his return". Having reached Delphi he sent back in writing the favourable response of the oracle to the effect that "the laws were excellent, and would render the people great and happy who should observe them". He then proceeded to starve himself to death, so that the Spartans might never be absolved from their oath and obligation. The laws whose sanction he thus indefinitely prolonged, were operative for seven hundred years, and much of the greatness of Sparta resulted from their ascetic, martial and uncompromising, character. The next great patriotic suicide whom we meet is Themistokles. This brilliant and tragic man, banished from Athens, offered his services and talents to the Persians, who were without a competent general. When the latter turned their attentions to the conquest of Athens, whose fleets under Cimon had been causing them trouble, they called on Themistokles to make good his promises. Given the leadership of the Persian armies, he was commanded to subdue his own country. The thought of conquering Athens, however, was insupportable, and as no alternative remained he committed suicide by drinking bull's blood, as the story goes. Thus he renounced honour, wealth, and probable victory. By his

death he averted from Attica the danger of a conquest that, without his knowledge and military genius, could not be undertaken with any chance of success.

A century later in Rome there opens the epic of the Decii. Rome at this time was engaged in her desperate struggle with the neighbouring Latins, upon whose successful outcome hung not only the future of the city, but the existence of a civilization. Decius Mus, at that time consul, led out the army against the Latins, and in the thick of the battle, as an example to his soldiers, dashed into the ranks of the enemy and sacrificed his life. Forty-one years later, fighting against the Gauls at the Battle of Sentinum, his son, the younger Decius, repeated his father's sacrifice, and, as Livy phrases it, "devoted himself to death".

This epic of suicide participated in a quick and concrete reward. The final defeat of both Latins and Gauls left Rome the assured mistress of central Italy.

Regulus provides the other prominent example of patriotic suicide under the Republic. Consul and commander in the first Punic war, he was defeated, captured, and taken to Carthage. After two years of unpleasant and humiliating exile he was dispatched to Rome to effect terms and try to persuade the Senate to an exchange of prisoners. Before his departure he had been bound by oath to return to Africa if unsuccessful. Considering on his arrival in Italy that the offers he brought were disadvantageous to his countrymen, he did everything in his power to dissuade them from accepting the Carthaginian terms. His efforts were successful, the proposals were turned down, and Regulus went back to Carthage and certain death. A barrel lined with spikes was prepared for him, and in this he met his end—the most stoic and perhaps the finest of the Roman suicides.

Earlier than the end of Regulus or the Decii had occurred the fabled suicide of Marcus Curtius. The story was

traditional in Rome. In the fourth century B.C. a vast smoking gulf is said to have opened in the Forum as the result of an earthquake. The town was in consternation. Consulted on the matter, the oracles said that only the gift of Rome's most precious possession would close up the rift. Marcus Curtius, saying that there was nothing more precious than a brave citizen, leapt into the gulf. Its subsequent closure was attributed to his sacrifice.

With the coming of the Empire, and the loosening of the social unit, and of the personal and idealistic ties which bound a man to the state, the forces making for patriotic suicide lessen in strength. The suicide of the Emperor Otho in A.D. 69 stands out as a noble exception. Having suffered one defeat and sacrificed many lives in his efforts to keep Vitellius out of Italy, he suddenly decided to give up the contest, although his chances of ultimate victory were still very fair and his troops fanatically loyal and willing. His reason, as he told his protesting soldiers, was that he would not expose such brave and courageous men to further dangers or waste the youth of Rome in civil war. For the good of his country he thought it better to terminate the war, even if this end could only be achieved by his own death. Plutarch records his magnificent speech:

> Looking round with a countenance composed and cheerful, he said, "This day, my fellow soldiers, I deem more blessed than that on which ye first made me Emperor, since I see you so devoted to me and am judged worthy of so high an honour at your hands. But do not rob me of a greater blessedness—that of dying nobly in behalf of fellow citizens so many and so good. If I was worthy to be Roman Emperor I ought to give my life freely for my country. I know that the victory of our adversaries is neither decisive nor assured. . . . Still it is not to defend Italy against Hannibal, or Pyrrhus, or the Cimbri, that our war is waged, but both parties are waging war against Romans, and we sin against our country, whether we conquer or are conquered. Believe me when I insist that I can die more honourably than I can reign. For I do not see how my victory can be of so

> great advantage to the Romans as my offering up my life to secure peace and concord and to prevent Italy from beholding such a day again."

Having compelled the senators and his generals to leave him and retire to Rome, and having destroyed all the correspondence which could inculpate his followers, he retired to his tent.

> As evening approached he slaked his thirst with a draught of cold water. Then two daggers were brought him; he tried the points of both and placed one beneath his pillow. . . . He passed a quiet night, and indeed, as is affirmed, he even slept somewhat. At dawn he fell on the steel.[1]

So moved were the common soldiers at the news of his death that many killed themselves, not only beside his funeral pyre, but at Bedriacum, Placentia, and distant camps.[2]

Suicides which come under the class of affection are not so easy to trace down as they usually are of a personal character, and do not involve the limelight of publicity or the comments of historians. However, this type too has a respectable classical history that goes right back to almost prehistoric times. When Theseus had set out for Crete to slay the Minotaur, he had arranged with his father, Aigeus, that the sailors on his returning ship were to hoist a white flag in token of success when Sunium hove in sight; if on the contrary they sailed back to Attica with their usual brownish-black canvas, it was to be a sign that Theseus, lost in the labyrinth, had succumbed to the bull. Theseus and the sailors, in the excitement of a victorious return, forgot the prearranged signal, and Aigeus, in sorrow at his son's imagined death, flung himself from the cliffs where he was waiting into the Aegean, the sea that since has kept his name. Homer tells that only the staying hand of Antilochus kept Achilles from

[1] Livy.

[2] Something rather similar had happened in Spain. On the assassination of Sertorius, the brilliant Marian, in 72 B.C., many of his soldiers sacrificed their own lives to the memory of their leader.

suicide, when, before Troy, he wished to cut his throat in despair at the death of his love, Patroclus. Affection, too, caused Dido's death, who, rather than marry again, stabbed herself on her husband's funeral pyre, having sworn eternal fidelity to the memory of her dead husband Sichaeus.[1] Under the republic and in that tight social cadre, one would have thought that personal affection had hardly room enough to become so all-absorbing or to express its sorrow by the extreme gesture of suicide. And yet one discovers, in the Republic's last days, that a partisan of one of the two factions which so bitterly disputed the chariot races sacrificed his life on the funeral pyre of a favourite coachman. A more plausible sorrow, caused, it is said, by the temporary absence of their husbands and lovers, produced a severe epidemic of suicide among the women of Miletus. Even this, however, seems an act of unworthy impatience when contrasted with the calm and devoted action of "noble Portia". Life without Brutus seemed to her worthless, and on receipt of the news of Brutus's death at Philippi she swallowed red-hot coals. Similarly the widow of Sejanus refused to outlive the murder of her children, and Cornelia committed suicide after the defeat and death of her husband, Crassus.

The dramatic end of Arria, however, has eclipsed that of the other Roman women who died for their husbands. Detected in a liberal and unsuccessful conspiracy against Claudius, her husband, Caecina Paetus, was condemned to death. He felt that suicide was his only dignified move, but a natural fear made him hesitate. Thereupon, Arria, to show him the way to liberty, seized his dagger and stabbed herself; dying, she handed the weapon to him with the famous words, "*Paete, non dolet*"—"Paetus, it doesn't hurt". Her daughter, also called Arria, tried later to imitate the mother's example, when her husband was condemned by Nero. She was, however, dissuaded.

[1] Vergil's Dido-Æneas legend appears to be pure invention.

Suicide, to avoid the degradations and the pain consequent on sickness and old age, seems to have been a fairly late development, though Rameses the Great, as far back as 1250 B.C., committed suicide in Egypt from despair at the loss of his sight. In Greece and Rome such deaths were not common, until, on the one hand, humanistic ideas had put about the notion of the dignity of the individual, and on the other hand the philosophers had given their sanction to a generous interpretation of what might legitimately be considered unbearable. The deaths of men such as Zeno, Cleanthes, and Atticus were all conditioned by their philosophical principles, and rightly come under the heading of philosophical suicides. It does appear, however, that as early as 500 B.C. it was an established custom in the Island of Ceos (the modern Lia) off Asia Minor, for men over sixty and anyone incapacitated by sickness to take their own lives, to which end the state kept a supply of poison.[1] Those who died in this way, " they did drown with garlands, as triumphers over humane misery ". Seneca, typically enough, thought this sort of self-destruction only worthy when the pain or disease threatened to cloud the mind. Pliny the Elder allowed three diseases, first among them gallstones, so grievously painful that they gave a man colour and countenance to kill himself.[2]

His nephew, Pliny the Younger, speaks in his letters of two prominent suicides who escaped in this way from pain and miserable old age; both deaths are recorded without adverse comment. One is that of Corellius Rufus, a man of great integrity who helped to launch Pliny; his suicide has already been mentioned. The other is that of the luxurious and wealthy Silius Italicus; troubled by an in-

[1] Strabo suggests that this custom originally arose owing to a shortage of food supplies.

[2] It was this Pliny who regarded the existence of poisonous herbs, with which a man might summon death painlessly and quickly, as one of the chief proofs of a kindly providence.

curable tumour, he starved himself to death and so ended a very fortunate and auspicious life. Such deaths are obviously sensible, and Diogenes was broad-minded enough to hand a dagger to Antisthenes when his favourite pupil was in great pain. Hadrian's physician, however, was afraid to do a similar kindness for the emperor. When the latter asked for hemlock he found himself in a dilemma, which only his own suicide could solve. Before Hadrian's illness Euphrates, the favourite of Roman society and an ageing stoic, had secured the imperial permission to end his life with the very drug which the emperor tried to obtain.

Such, then, are the four types of suicide which seem to have been commonest in the classical world. How common they actually were is not to be determined. Probably time and our knowledge of the philosophic attitude have greatly exaggerated the numbers of classical suicides. It must be remembered that philosophic ideas would only directly affect the educated minority, and that among the people as a whole primitive taboos and the suicide horror must always have remained fairly strong. Besides, literature and history then concerned themselves only with the upper class. There we do know that suicide was fairly frequent, but what of the unrecorded populace? This vast majority must have restored the balance and would show suicide to have been of relatively infrequent occurrence: perhaps only the privilege and practice of the rich.

There is a last sort of suicide which, though too rare to cause a type, was by its very nature spectacular—the exhibitionist suicide. The idleness and the wealth of the Hellenistic world, and its vastness in which the individual might well feel his personality swamped, all favoured an exhibitionist death. Before the eyes of a wondering Empire the wish for notoriety could be gratified on a more magnificent scale than ever since. The bid for recognition made by a certain Sutherland who donned a suit of black

and shot himself in front of George III, pales before the public end of a Calanus, or a Peregrinus. Even the death of the unsatisfied nineteenth-century gentleman who attached himself to a rocket, appears as a discreet gesture by comparison with the exhibitionism possible in Greek and Roman times.

The death of Peregrinus was not exhibitionism of the ordinary sort. Like Miss Davison, who threw herself under the feet of the horses at the Derby of 1913, he sought death and notoriety for a particular end. His aim was the further glory and repute of the Cynic doctrines. A native of the Propontis and a man of wealth, Peregrinus had early given away his family fortune; after suffering imprisonment as a Christian he was attracted by the mysticism of the East, and finally ended by adopting the costume and doctrines of the Cynics. Preaching the rule of philosophy, the vanity of pleasure and the contempt of death, he made his way along the shores of the Mediterranean, carrying with him an ever-growing reputation. Eventually his wanderings, or, as it was hinted, his ambition, brought him to Rome, where even the life of Antoninus Pius did not escape his criticisms. Expelled from Italy, he returned to Greece, which henceforward became his headquarters. There his invectives and his reputation both continued to grow. It was at this moment, when his fame was at last world-wide and his position acknowledged among the first Cynics, that he decided to put an end to his life in a way that would rivet the attention of the whole Empire on his philosophy and at the same time demonstrate the true Cynic's contempt for death. Like Hercules, the mythical patron of his sect, he announced that he would die upon a flaming pyre. The date of his spectacular death was chosen to coincide with the Olympic Games, and a vast concourse of people, many of them in a state of religious fervour, collected to watch the great rite. Among them was Lucian, who, as a practical man and an antagonist of Cynicism, has left a very biassed account of the occasion.

To him Peregrinus was simply a determined impostor. Above the roar of the surging crowd Lucian could hear very little of the old man's speech, as he told the people that he was about to bring "a golden life to a golden close". Lucian did, however, notice that he was very pale, and as the moon rose he saw him approach his vast pyre surrounded by his disciples. Taking off his Cynic's robes, he threw incense on the flames, then having invoked the spirits of his ancestors, he passed into the conflagration and was seen no more. It was said that a brilliant phoenix winged upward from the pyre.

The two other mortal conflagrations which caused the greatest stir in classic times are included here as exhibitionist suicides, though since both were engineered by Brahmins they might well be classed as ritualistic and institutional suicides. The death of Calanus, however, has in practice little of the truly institutional about it. Having left India in the train of Alexander, he was disowned by his fellow Brahmins. Corrupted by the life and luxuries of Alexander's court, he gave up the purity of his vocational life and seems to have degenerated into the flatterer of a prince. At the age of thirty-seven he contracted a disease, probably due to his excesses. Threatened with blindness and finding his malady going from bad to worse, he decided on a grandiose suicide. An elevated pyre was built and, dressed in magnificent robes, he ascended into the flames in view of the whole Macedonian army, dying, as Strabo says, "in accordance with his ancestral custom". Three hundred years later a rather similar scene was repeated before the Emperor Augustus. The chief actor was again a Brahmin, but the motives this time seem to have been almost purely religious. The exhibitionistic element is fortuitous. Porus, the Indian king and descendant of Alexander's ally, had sent to the Emperor, along with an embassy, a selection of curious gifts likely to intrigue a Western eye: "The gifts"—Strabo is

quoting from an older historian—" were presented by eight naked servants, who were clad only in loin-cloths besprinkled with sweet-smelling odours." They consisted of a man who was born without arms (" whom I have myself seen," says Strabo), large vipers, a serpent ten cubits in length, a river tortoise three cubits in length, a partridge larger than a vulture,[1] and lastly a Brahmin who had been sent all the way from India expressly to commit suicide for the delectation of the Emperor.

Augustus was at the time in Athens, and there the public and voluntary immolation of the Brahmin took place before a large crowd.

> Whereas [says Strabo] some commit suicide when they suffer adversity, seeking release from the ills at hand, others do so when their lot is happy, as was the case with this man; for . . . although this man had fared as he had wished up to that time, he thought it necessary then to depart this life, lest something untoward might happen to him if he tarried here . . . therefore, he leaped upon a pyre with a laugh, his naked body anointed, wearing only a loin-cloth.

This Brahmin's excessive caution and desire to liquidate his earthly happiness were recorded by the following inscription: " Here lies Zarmanochegas, an Indian from Bargosa, who immortalized himself in accordance with the ancestral customs of Indians."

It was an ardent desire for a more earthly immortalization than the Brahmin's which caused Empedocles to jump unseen into the crater of Mount Etna. This was an odd exhibitionism, a desire for the permanence of his memory and not for a temporary limelight on his personality. He hoped that his absolute disappearance, coinciding with his own prophecies, would establish the legend that he had never died but had ascended to join the gods. Unfortunately the volcano would have us part in the deception, and soon after

[1] Presumably a bustard.

belched forth his sandal. This, together with the testimony of a shepherd who had seen him near the rim of the crater, betrayed his conspiracy. This revelation, though it ruined his reputation, by a curious paradox provided him with the immortality for which he had shown himself so avid.

Two other exhibitionists of classic times are worth mentioning. First, there is that King Ptolemy of Cyprus whom Cato was sent to deal with. Hearing of the Roman's approach Ptolemy determined to die in avaricious style, destroying at the same time his fabulous treasures, himself, and his servants. All were ceremoniously embarked on a large vessel, and the king put out to sea with the intention of boring holes in the ship's bottom. The thought of wasting such gold was, however, too much for his resolution. Returning to port he procured a less dramatic death, and his treasure found a lease of life in Rome.

Sardanapalus, the Persian king, conceived of death on a yet grander scale, and was more determined in his resolution. Arbaces, one of his generals, having seen the king "painted with vermilion and adorned like a woman, sitting among his concubines carding purple wool and sitting among them with his feet up, wearing a woman's robe and with his beard carefully scraped and his face smoothed with pumice-stone (for he was whiter than milk, and pencilled under his eyes and eyebrows)", was overcome with moral indignation, revolted, and gathered a large army. Sardanapalus, defeated in battle, determined none the less on a magnificent death. Within the precincts of his palace he ordered a vast pyre to be made and on it he set a hundred and fifty golden couches and tables.

> And he also erected on the funeral pile a chamber a hundred feet long, made of wood; and in it he had couches spread, and there he himself lay down with his wife, and his concubines lay on other couches around. . . . And he made the roof of this apartment of large stout beams, and then all the walls of it he made of

numerous thick planks, so that it was impossible to escape out of it. And in it he placed ten millions of talents of gold and a hundred millions of talents of silver, and robes, and purple garments, and every kind of apparel imaginable. And after that he bade the slaves set fire to the pile; and it was fifteen days burning. And those who saw the smoke wondered, and thought that he was celebrating a great sacrifice; but the eunuchs alone knew what was really being done. And in this way Sardanapalus, who had spent his life in extraordinary luxury, died with as much magnanimity as possible.[1]

Amongst these stylists there should be a place kept for Heliogabulus, unsuccessful as an emperor but unrivalled as an eccentric. The man who combed Arabia that the phoenix might grace his table, also prepared the instruments of his own death with meticulous forethought. Syrian priests had told him that he would end his life by suicide; and for this purpose he provided himself with a golden sword, poison enclosed in a priceless ring, and a rope of imperial purple and gold. Finally, in case none of these methods should suit his mood, he ordered a pavement of jewels to be laid beneath one of his towers, considering that only precious stones could decently receive an imperial precipitate. His forethought was unfortunately wasted, as his own guards murdered him.

II. LIBER MORI

Mori licet cui vivere non placet, he is at liberty to die who does not wish to live: this, with qualifications, became the final attitude of most classical philosophers. Cynic, Stoic, and Epicurean philosophies all led to an acceptance of suicide. In spite of this, however, there were always two main lines of thought in opposition, one deriving from Pythagoras, the other from Aristotle. The Orphic or Pythagorean doctrine viewed life as a penitential journey, a

[1] Athenaeus. *The Deipnosophists.*

discipline imposed by the gods to which a man must submit himself. The measure of his humility and submission was the measure of his virture.

Athenaeus, writing in the third century, gathered together some Pythagoreans at an imaginary banquet. Their spokesman, stating the Pythagorean position, said

> that the souls of all men were bound in the body, and in the life which is on earth, for the sake of punishment; and that God has issued an edict that if they do not remain there until he voluntarily releases them himself they shall fall into more numerous and more important calamities. On which account all men, being afraid of those threatenings of the gods, fear to depart from life by their own act, but only gladly welcome death when it comes in old age, trusting that the deliverance of their soul will take place with the full consent of those who have the power to sanction it. And this doctrine we ourselves believe.

Suicide was thus a rebellion for the Pythagoreans, an unruly escape from a destiny laid down by the superior powers. "We must wait," they said, "to be set free in God's appointed time." Pythagoras's own theory of numbers further strengthened this feeling about the wrongness of suicide. There were, he said, just so many souls available for use in the world at any given moment. By suicide you upset the spiritual mathematic; for it might well be that no other soul was ready to fill the gap caused in the world by your so sudden and arbitrary exit.

Plato in the *Phaedo* makes Socrates echo and extend the Orphic idea about suicide. Man is God's chattel: self-destruction is a mutilation of divine property. The passage has played so great a part in the moral history of suicide that it is worth quoting at some length.

> The reason [against suicide] which the secret teaching [1] gives, that man is in a kind of prison, and that he may not set himself free, nor escape from it, seems to be rather profound and not easy

[1] The esoteric system of the Pythagoreans.

to fathom. But I do think, Cebes, that it is true that the Gods are our guardians, and that we men are a part of their property. . . . If one of your possessions were to kill itself, though you had not signified that you had wished it to die, should you not be angry with it? Should you not punish it, if punishment were possible? . . . In the same way perhaps it is not unreasonable to hold that no man has a right to take his own life, but that he must wait until God sends some necessity upon him, as has now been sent upon me.

Further, in the eyes of Socrates, a mortal is not merely the property of the gods; he is their soldier too. A man's life is like a soldier's watch, and for this reason suicide is tantamount to desertion. Neither men nor soldiers should leave their posts without orders from their superior. Plato, however, can by no means be ranked altogether in the anti-suicide camp. The extreme desirability of death and the ideas of immortality expressed in the *Phaedo* have been a strong pro-suicide force. So moved was Cleombrotus, a young Greek philosopher, by the very reading of it, that the dialogue is said to have been directly responsible for his throwing himself into the sea.[1] Further, Plato admits that in certain cases of *necessitas*, such as extreme and incurable illness, suicide may be justified. "If any man," he says, "labour of an incurable disease, he may dispatch himself, if it be to his good." Plato represents, in fact, a guarded middle position. This position the later philosophers did not try to take by storm. It was unnecessary to do so. By simply extending Plato's *necessitas*, by making it a question of individual decision, they made it applicable to any and every case. After all, they argued, only the suicide knows when

[1] Cf., *Paradise Lost*, Book III.

"And he who, to enjoy
Plato's Elysium, leaped into the sea,
Cleombrotus."

Milton has allowed Adam to express his adverse attitude to suicide at some length in Book X.

life is absolutely insupportable to him; he is the judge of what situation constitutes a *necessitas* for his own suicide.

The true interpretation of Plato's attitude was kept alive by his spiritual successors, the Neo-Platonists. Though Plotinus also speaks of a "stern necessity" which may sometimes excuse suicide, his outlook, if anything, is more severe than Plato's own. "The soul," he writes in the Ennead, "will wait for the body to be completely severed from it; then it makes no departure, it simply finds itself free. . . . There must be no withdrawal as long as there is any hope of progress." These ideas were for Plotinus maxims to be put into practical application. Suspecting his friend and biographer, Porphyry, of wishing to commit suicide, he went out of his way to dissuade him. Porphyry tells how Plotinus "came unexpectedly to my house where I had secluded myself, and told me that my decision to commit suicide sprung not from reason but from mere melancholy". Plotinus's counsel was altogether practical; he prescribed rest and departure from Rome, a treatment that proved successful.

The Aristoteleans in their condemnation of suicide used very different arguments from the Pythagoreans. Their attitude carries a certain weight to-day. In his review of justice, Aristotle is led to consider whether a man can do an injustice to himself, and this brings him to suicide. Suicide, Aristotle says, is a voluntary injury not committed as a lawful retaliatory act.

> Therefore the suicide commits injustice; but against whom? It seems to be against the state rather than against himself; for he suffers voluntarily, and nobody suffers injustice voluntarily. This is why the state exacts a penalty; suicide is punished by certain marks of dishonour, *as being an offence against the state.*

The validity of this argument depends on the old question whether the individual exists for the state or the state for the individual. Even the later philosophers rightly

recognized the suicide's social responsibility, and Seneca admitted the wrongness of the act where duties to the state, or even to the family, were sacrificed. Cicero, realizing that the same course might be right for one man and wrong for another, makes a more subtle distinction, based not on circumstances but on character. "Diversity of character," he says, "carries with it so great significance that suicide may be for one man a duty, for another [under the same circumstances] a crime." Cicero's position, like that of certain other practical writers, is equivocal. He devoted a whole essay to the praise of Cato's life and death, and he often shows a sympathy for suicide. "The true point of time," he says, "in which a man should die, is when he can do it opportunely or with dignity to himself, without paying any regard to the length or shortness of his life". On the other hand he as often condemns it: the suicide leaves his post; he shakes off the destiny with which the divine will has charged him. In the *Somnum Scipionis* the shades of his ancestors even tell the young Scipio that he can never rejoin them in the next world if he commits suicide. Both Caesar and Plutarch were more definitely opposed, though the only thing that the latter could find to account for man's attachment to life was "the fear of death". He was, however, antagonistic to the whole Stoic position and went so far as to write an attack on their practice and doctrine.

As time went on philosophy retreated from Aristotle's extreme position. The duty to the state was not considered to be so exclusive that the *private* individual must be responsible to the latter even for his manner of dying. The official, indeed, must stay the course while he could still be useful; but the private citizen might leave when he wished.

Elsewhere when speaking of courage, Aristotle condemns suicide as an uncourageous act.

> To seek death [he says] in order to escape from poverty, or the pangs of love, or from pain or sorrow, is not the act of a

courageous man, but rather of a coward; for it is weakness to fly from troubles, and the suicide does not endure death because it is noble to do so, but to escape evil.

Seneca himself agrees with him to the extent that, if it is brave to seek death, it is even braver to stay and endure evil. The whole question of the bravery or cowardice of suicide is always being rehashed, and the truth lies somewhere between the idea of the suicide-hero and the dictum of Sir Thomas Browne, that the suicide is not one who disdains death, but one who fears life. To face any form of death voluntarily obviously demands great bravery from most people; conversely it is often an act of cowardice to turn one's back on life. We are up against an irresolvable antinomy, and we have to decide each case on its own merits. There will nearly always be a quaint mixture, fear and bravery going hand in hand.

As one would expect, the primitive and popular hate of suicide barely makes its way through to philosophy, though the Orphic beliefs with their religious basis must have preserved something of this feeling and of the idea that the suicide was unclean and tainted by his violent death. It is interesting, however, though not surprising, to find the instinctive horror coming out in literature. Vergil, in the *Aeneid*, clearly represents the popular attitude. Having crossed the Acheron and penetrated into hell he finds there the ghosts of those who had committed suicide when *mad*, together with the spirits of infants (cf., the unbaptized infant of Christianity and the dead children of the Baganda tribe; see page 38), and certain others. Here is the passage referring to the suicides:

Proxima deinde tenent maesti loca qui sibi letum
Insontes peperere manu, lucemque perosi
Projecere animas. Quam vellent aethere in alto
Nunc et pauperiem et duros perferre labores!

Fas obstat, tristisque palus inamabilis undae
Alligat et noviens Styx interfusa coercet.[1]

There is obviously no moral bias here, any more than where dead infants are concerned, for the suicides were of "guiltless" mind. The condemnation and horror are irrational, primitive, and semi-religious.

The opposing philosophic forces which condoned and even tended to promote suicide were mustered under the three banners of Stoicism, Epicureanism, and Cynicism. The Cynics, the earliest of these philosophical sects, exerted the least direct influence. A certain pedantry, of which Diogenes's actions are typical, and an absolute disregard for science and liberal culture, sidetracked the movement. It is interesting none the less to find that Diogenes himself apparently committed suicide by holding his breath. Stoicism, which developed certain cynical features such as personal reliance and the discipline of character, exerted a wider actual influence and is more intimately connected with our subject. "To live consistently with nature" was the reasonable aim of the Stoics and the goal which men such as Attalus, Seneca and Epictetus, set themselves in the first century A.D. These philosophers did not separate body from soul into an absolute duality, nor did they expect to retain a personal individuality after death. Believing in the certainty of know-

[1] *Aeneid*, vi, 426.

And next are those, who, hateful of the day,
With guiltless hands their sorrowing lives have ta'en,
And miserably flung their souls away.
How gladly now, in upper air again,
Would they endure their poverty and pain!
It may not be. The fates their doom decide
Past hope, and bind them to this sad domain.
Dark round them rolls the sea, unlovely tide;
Ninefold the waves of Styx those dreary realms divide.

Translation by FAIRFAX TAYLOR.

ledge and the possibility of appropriate action, they allowed themselves to be guided by reason, and supported by will.

Epicureanism, developing coincidently with Stoicism, equally concerns our subject. It can fairly be called the first materialist philosophy. Nature, escaping from capricious providence, was for the first time ruled by scientific law, and the soul putting off incorporeality became compounded of four atoms. Pleasure and pain were the only human driving forces; the only use of knowledge was to promote happiness, and the only point of the virtues was that they tended to maintain it. A reasonable utilitarianism was the keynote of the movement, and Epicurus himself said, "Vain is the discourse of that philosopher by whom no suffering is healed."

As touching suicide there are two points in these advocate philosophies which are worth noting. First of all there is the emphasis and responsibility which is placed in each case upon the individual. The decline of the small city state in Greece, and later in Rome, left the individual in isolation, without precedents for conduct or rules for thought; he had nowhere to turn but inward to himself. Thus the individual became of importance, and such isolation together with the necessity for thought leads, as we shall see, to suicide. Secondly, these philosophies are pronouncedly rational; they mark, in fact, the first triumph of reason. And reason, like isolation, leads to an increase in suicide, for reason sees a variety of situations in which death is preferable to a painful or dishonourable life. In classical times, as later after the Renaissance, the birth of reason meant an increase in self-destruction. Epictetus admirably voices the reasoned attitude, as it bears on suicide. "Above all things remember that the door is open. Be not more timid than boys at play. As they, when they cease to take pleasure in their games, declare they will no longer play, so do you, when all things begin to pull upon you, retire."

These Stoic and Epicurean philosophers looked on suicide as a purely personal affair, lawful under almost any circumstances, and surely wise where honour, or disease and old age, were involved. Of the last, Seneca says:

> I will not relinquish old age if it leaves my better part intact. But if it begins to shake my mind, if it destroys its faculties one by one, if it leaves me not life but breath, I will depart from the putrid or tottering edifice. I will not escape by death from disease so long as it may be healed, and leaves my mind unimpaired. I will not raise my hand against myself on account of pain, for so to die is to be conquered. But if I know that I must suffer without hope of relief, I will depart, not through fear of pain itself, but because it prevents all for which I would live.

Musonius, a fellow Stoic, puts a similar idea with graphic clearness:

> Just as a landlord who has not received his rent, pulls down the doors, removes the rafters, and fills up the well, so I seem to be driven out of this little body, when nature, which has let it to me, takes away one by one, eyes and ears, hands and feet. I will not therefore delay longer, but will cheerfully depart as from a banquet.

The way a man died was his own affair: a serious affair certainly and to be approached with wisdom and gravity, but none the less a private matter. "As I choose the ship," Seneca says, "in which I will sail, and the house I will inhabit, so I will choose the death by which I leave life. . . . In no matter more than in death should we act according to our desire."

Suicide became in time the final resource, and the last weapon in the battery of Stoic argument: Man was unconquerable, the dignity of human personality, the determination of the human will, need never be broken, for the door was always open; man's last and most faithful ally, death, would never desert him. Thanks to the proximity of death, man stood invincible on earth: his spirit need never be subdued, his body need never be tamed. Amid the treachery, corruption, and horror, that surrounded the Imperial

Court, the philosophers clung to their right to die with a strange joy and pathetic tenacity. Seneca, again their most eloquent spokesman, and eventually the victim of Nero's malice cried:

> To death alone it is due that life is not a punishment, that, erect beneath the frowns of fortune, I can preserve my mind unshaken and master of itself. . . . I see the rack and the scourge, and the instruments of torture adapted to every limb and to every nerve; but I also see Death. She stands beyond my savage enemies, beyond my haughty fellow-countrymen. Slavery loses its bitterness when by a step I can pass to liberty. Against all the injuries of life, I have the refuge of death.

And again he says:

> Foolish man, what do you bemoan, and what do you fear? Wherever you look there is an end of evils. You see that yawning precipice? It leads to liberty. You see that flood, that river, that well? Liberty houses within them. You see that stunted, parched, and sorry tree? From every branch liberty hangs. Your neck, your throat, your heart are all so many ways of escape from slavery. . . . Do you enquire the road to freedom? You shall find it in every vein of your body.

Viewed from this angle, suicide appears as a keynote of the Stoic doctrines.

These philosophers, unlike many others, practised nobly the death they preached. There is something almost amusing about Zeno's end. Founder of the Stoic philosophy, he had always preached that a man was at liberty to abandon life and should be ready to do so if ever he found it not worth living. He had lived to the age of ninety-eight without meeting any *contretemps* sufficiently serious to warrant his departure; at that advanced age, however, as he was leaving his school of philosophy, he fell down and put a toe out of joint. So disgusted was he at this, and so convinced of the vanity of the world, that he went home and hung himself on the spot, bearing honourable but tardy witness to his own credo.

Cleanthes, his successor, lived up to his beliefs in a less impetuous fashion.

As a cure for some trifling indisposition—a gumboil apparently—his doctor ordered him to knock off food for two days. The treatment having proved effective, he was told that he might return to a normal diet again; he continued, however, to refuse food, saying that "as he had advanced so far on his journey towards death, he would not retreat", and so in due course he starved himself. The tradition did not die with these early Stoics. Cocceius Nerva, the favourite of the Emperor Tiberius, staging his death as a philosophic protest against the extravagance of the Imperial court, imitated Cleanthes in self-starvation.

Attalus, another Stoic advocate of suicide, also flourished in the reign of Tiberius—if one can be said to flourish on bread and water. Even this diet he only continued owing to the persuasion of his friends, among whom was Seneca. The latter records Attalus's advice to Marcellinus, who, suffering from an incurable disease, was contemplating suicide.

> Be not tormented, my Marcellinus [he said], as if you were deliberating of any great matter. Life is a thing of no dignity or importance. Your very slaves, your animals, possess it in common with yourself: but it is a great thing to die honourably, prudently, bravely. Think how long you have been engaged in the same dull course: eating, sleeping, and indulging your appetites. This has been the circle. Not only a prudent, brave, or a wretched man may wish to die, but even a fastidious one.

As a result of his counsel, Marcellinus quietly starved himself to death.

However, it remained for Seneca—more of a philosopher in his death than in his life—to create the final type and example of Stoic suicide. Having fallen from the Imperial favour, the only course open to him was to forestall Nero's vengeance with his own hand. He was at his villa when the news came that the Emperor desired his death. Far from

(*Anonymous 17th century engraving*)

THE DEATH OF SENECA

being upset, he devoted himself to rallying the friends who were gathered round him. While he restrained their tears by words, threats, and exhortations, he asked:

> "Where is now your philosophy? Where are now those well-considered precepts which for so many years you have kept against adversity? Who has not suffered from the ignoble cruelty of Nero? Nothing else was to be expected but that, after killing his mother and his brother, he should send to death his teacher and preceptor."

Having determined to take his life, he embraced his wife Paulina, but she, refusing to be left alone, insisted on sharing his death. Their embraces, as Tacitus says, were loosened only by the steel which freed them.[1] At the very last Seneca showed the courage and consideration of the true Stoic. Exhausted by the pain of a clumsy wound, he persuaded his wife to be carried into a neighbouring chamber, "lest by his torments he should disturb her and lest he should himself slip into an unworthy impatience at seeing her suffer".

Epicurus had said that one must weigh carefully whether one preferred to wait for death or artificially to forestall it. His followers believed that the door was always open and were hardly behind the Stoics in living up to their beliefs. Lucretius, the Epicurean poet, had written:

> If one day, as well may happen, life grows wearisome, there only remains to pour a libation to death and oblivion. A drop of subtle poison will gently close your eyes to the sun, and waft you smiling into the eternal night whence everything comes and to which everything returns.

In due course the wearisome day came and the poet's suicide followed. Atticus, the friend of Cicero, and the philosopher Diodorus, were other eminent Epicureans who took their own lives. It is Petronius, however, who strikes the typical

[1] Paulina did not, in fact, die. Nero insisted on her rescue and treatment.

Epicurean note in a death that may be contrasted with Seneca's. Petronius, the Beau Brummel of his time, the *arbiter elegantiarum* of the court and the model of Imperial voluptuaries, was an extraordinary figure. Not satisfied with being a person of exquisite manners and perfect taste (and possibly the author of the *Satyricon*), Petronius was also an admirable provincial administrator and an able consul. Thrown out of favour by a court intrigue, and believing that Nero had decided on his death, he resolved to forestall the blow. Gathering his friends at his villa, he opened and closed his veins at pleasure; in the intervals he slept or sauntered round in conversation. His last hours characteristically enough were not spent in consideration of the immortality of the soul, but in an exchange of witticisms, scandal, and the important nothings of the hour. Finally, having settled all his business, his veins were opened for the last time, and in the midst of a cheerful and magnificent banquet he died as gracefully as he had lived.

Petronius was a sophisticated person, influenced by and conversant with contemporary and philosophical ideas. His death is understandable. One may say the same of people like the poet Lucan. The latter opened his veins and as the moment of death approached began to repeat some lines from his own *Pharsalia*, descriptive of a similar suicide. But what of the other people?—the nonentities whom philosophy guided to one suicide or another? That remarkable figure Hegesias, who wrote a work on self-starvation and was known to antiquity as the "Orator of Death", proclaimed that the fleeting pleasures of life were worthless and that death was the only wise alternative. So successful was his teaching that he initiated an *epidemic* of suicide. The civil authorities were forced to take steps, and Ptolemy Philadelphus expelled the dangerous advocate from Egypt. In what way and for what reasons did and could such philosophies make death palatable to the man in the street?

> Stoicism [says Lecky] taught men to hope little, but to fear nothing. It did not array death in brilliant colours as the path to positive felicity, but it endeavoured to divest it, as the end of suffering, of every terror. Life lost much of its bitterness when men had found a refuge from the storms of fate, a speedy deliverance from dotage and pain. Death ceased to be terrible when it was regarded rather as a remedy than as a sentence. Life and death in the Stoical system were attuned to the same key.

A conception of death the same, or similar to this, extended far beyond philosophical circles. Death did not present the haunting and fearful uncertainty which had characterized it in earlier and more superstitious times and which it was again to assume later. There was no idea of hell, and the absence of all sense of sin left people free from the fear of a later and eternal retribution. Death was indeed a problem, something to be argued about objectively, but it did not enter people's heads that once the transit was over anything unpleasant or worthy of fear might be in store for them. Cicero crystallizes the feelings of the educated man. "Souls either remain after death or they perish in death. If they remain they are happy; if they perish they are not wretched." the tone of such arguments reminds one of the end of Antoninus Pius. When the dying Emperor was asked by a tribune what was to be the watchword of the night, he replied magnificently, "*aequanimitas*".

Current ideas about life and the after-world we may say tended to make equanimity a possible mood in which to approach death. But that is only one side of the picture. The other is the contempt for pain characteristic of the ancient world, and which we have met in an even greater degree among primitives (see page 19 *et seq.*). It is difficult for the modern European with his extreme sensibility to realize this indifference to pain, though the examples that follow prove its existence clearly enough. Athenaeus, for instance, relates that some of the Thracians at their banquets used to *play the game of hanging*. They

> fix a round noose to some high place, exactly beneath which they place a stone . . . then they cast lots, and he who draws the lot, holding a sickle in his hand, stands upon the stone, and puts his neck into the halter. Another person then moves the stone from under him, and if he cannot cut the rope in time with his sickle, he is hung; and the rest laugh, thinking his death good sport.

There is a natural and lighthearted contempt of danger here, that outdoes the Stoics themselves.

Secondly, Frazer tells us that at Rome in the time of the Punic wars it was not only possible but easy to secure candidates for execution at the cost of 5 *minae* (about £20), to be paid to the dead man's heirs. Such competition was there to die at this price that many people secured the privilege by offering to be beaten to death rather than executed—a more painful and spectacular bargain. As far as can be judged these candidates for execution were beheaded or cudgelled solely to provide amusement and a good "turn" for jaded spectators. Real death could thus be the fare of the "theatre-going public". Other explanations are that these candidates were either offering to act as living funerary sacrifices, or as substitutes for condemned criminals. At all events the facts remain. They prove an absolute disregard for pain and death.

Added to this almost physiological insensibility, there were contributory influences, active at the time when the Stoic and Epicurean doctrines were at their height, and tending to make suicide easy and acceptable. In the century that preceded, and in that which followed, the birth of Christ, the upper stratum of society was in a state of turmoil. Civil wars followed one upon another, spilt blood was not remarkable, and victory was usually to the strong and unscrupulous. The despotism and irrational cruelty of a Nero left none of the upper class in security. Unless it were possible to develop an indifference to death, life for these people would have been an intolerable nightmare of fears, tremors, and tortured expectations. To live at all it was necessary to be brave.

Thus both a natural disregard of pain, and a temporary state of social uncertainty and danger, predisposed the educated to accept the doctrines of suicide contained in the Stoic and Epicurean philosophies. These provided a rational and dignified basis from which to face a very difficult situation. Physical courage and the state of society needed only the stimulus of philosophy to elevate suicide to the place and popularity which it enjoyed in the time of Seneca.

III. LAWS AND PENALTIES

Broadly speaking, law and custom regarding suicide in the ancient world divides conveniently into two types, one deriving from religion and popular superstition, and the other having a practical and economic basis. The first type, being typical of primitive periods, is commonest in early Greece; later, as the rationalization of the Mediterranean progressed and intelligence was exalted as against the other faculties, this type tends to decrease, and among the educated in Rome only survives in the pontifical law, whose authority in the Empire received a tolerant and half-humorous acknowledgment. By contrast the penalties with an avowedly economic basis, not recognized in the Periclean age, increase as time goes on. With the development of standing armies and large slave estates they become of considerable importance.

The religious prejudice against suicides, as we have shown, derives from the fear of the ghost and the idea of blood guilt; this prejudice found expression in various laws and customs in the Greek cities. First it is interesting to discover that usually such laws and customs were inapplicable to suicides who died through voluntary starvation. This death was presumably a calm and considered action and, as such, was believed to be free from all the agony, rancour, and perturbation which made the ordinary suicide haunt his

fellow-men after death. Secondly, and more obviously important, there was no physical violence, no blood guilt, no idea of the sudden and protesting wrench of the soul from the body, a parting of which the ancients were most apprehensive.

The first case of discrimination against a suicide occurs in the *Iliad*, where Ajax after his suicide before Troy is *buried*, and not cremated as would have been the ordinary procedure with so illustrious a warrior. There seems, however, a certain amount of doubt whether the denial of cremation was ever the usual penalty for Greek suicides. At Athens criminals, and more particularly those convicted of pillaging the temples, were refused cremation and buried in a sort of open ditch; but there is no evidence to show that this usage was generally applied to suicides. If such a penalty existed it would have arisen owing to the primitive idea that fire is holy and must not be contaminated with anything unclean. The regular Athenian punishment visited on the suicide's corpse was the cutting off of the hand which had been the instrument of death. Even this penalty, founded on primitive ideas of superstition, probably had a limited application. Plato, in his *Laws*, says that the man who commits suicide "when he is not compelled to it by the occurrence of some intolerable and inevitable misfortune, nor by falling into some disgrace that is beyond remedy or endurance" must be buried according to religious law, and adds,

> for those thus destroyed the tombs shall be, first, in an isolated position with not even one adjacent; and, secondly, they shall be buried in those borders of the twelve districts [of Athens] which are barren and nameless, without note, and with neither head-stone nor name to indicate the tombs.

Demonassa, Queen of Cyprus, who herself committed suicide, enforced even stricter laws against self-murderers. They were allowed no funeral rites at all and were left

unburied (the second penalty probably being a product of the primitive superstition that no soul could find rest until covered with soil.) In Thebes they were equally uncompromising, and the Spartans even refused an honourable burial to Artemidorus, who sacrificed his life unnecessarily fighting against the Persians at the battle of Plataea. The Spartans are certain to have at all times been most antagonistic, and within the close and compelling framework of their state so individualistic an action must, at best, have been an exceptional occurrence. Montaigne tells the following story of a Lacedaemonian child who was sold as a slave. Rather than perform abject and servile tasks (he was apparently sent to fetch a chamber pot) he flung himself headlong from the top of his master's house, saying, "Thou shalt see whom thou hast bought; for it were a shame for me to serve, having libertie so neere at hand." It is worth noticing, however, that this sort of suicide takes place outside the social framework. The suicide of the Spartan king, Cleomenes, also took place under peculiar circumstances. He had just returned from a compulsory exile; he was cordially hated by the citizens; and he was in no sense a real member of the community. The same may be said of Pausanias, who fled to sanctuary and there starved to death. Like Cleomenes, he had turned his hand against the Lacedaemonians and stood outside the Spartan framework. The voluntary death of the Spartan as citizen and soldier comes, as we have seen, under the heading of institutional suicide.

Plutarch, in his *Mulierum Virtutes*, tells how the inhabitants of Miletos, where apparently no anti-suicide legislation existed, combated an epidemic of self-destruction among the women of the island by ordaining that those "who hanged themselves should be carried out to burial through the market place". The fear of shame and exposure in this case had the desired effect, and the epidemic ceased without the imposition of further penalties.

Parallel to the suicide opposition which from scattered references we can trace in most parts of Greece, there was undoubtedly a line of opinion, strengthening as we approach the Roman period, favourable to judicious self-destruction. Such self-destruction is obviously closely connected with euthanasia and one is reminded of the regularity with which the Spartans, and others to a lesser degree, exposed their weak infants, leaving them to die on the mountains rather than to continue a sick and miserable existence. At Ceos, the home of Simonides, whose people were responsible for achieving the improvements in lethal drugs which eventually made hemlock a practical instrument of state execution, suicide was a legally recognized death. It is reliably reported that those over sixty were allowed, or perhaps even expected, to take their own lives by poison. In defence of this practice Donne pointed out that if the state may take life, if it may dispose of the criminal and the traitor, it surely also has power to give permission to the individual to dispatch himself.

Montaigne recounts how Pompey witnessed the end of an aged Cean lady who availed herself of the island privilege.

> A woman of great authority, having first yeelded an accompt unto her Citizens, and shewed good reasons why she was resolved to end her life, earnestly entreated Pompey to be an assistant at her death, that so it might be esteemed more honourable . . . She had lived foure score and ten yeares in a most happy state of minde and body, but then lying on her bed, better adorned than before she was accustomed to have it, and leaning on her elbow, thus she bespake: As for my part, having hitherto ever tasted the favourable visage of fortune, for feare the desire of living overlong should make me taste of her frownes, with an happy and successful end, I will now depart, and licence the remainder of my soule. . . . That done, having preached unto, and exhorted all her people and kinsfolks, to an unitie and peace, and divided her goods amongst them . . . with an assuredly-staide hand she tooke the cup, wherein the poyson was, and having made her vowes unto Mercurie, and prayers, to conduct her to some happy place in the other world, roundly swallowed that mortal potion . . .

The Greek colonists who founded Marseilles brought with them a similar usage. There the magistrates kept a supply of poison always at hand for those who, upon alleging adequate reasons, obtained permission from the Senate to kill themselves. It seems probable that in many other places, Athens included, the right to commit suicide must have been similarly granted under especially trying circumstances. Plato speaks of suicide as culpable only "when not legally ordered by the state", and a classical writer sums-up the general position as follows:

> Let the man who wishes to live no longer explain his reasons to the Senate, and, having obtained their permission, leave this life. . . . Let the unfortunate recount his sorrows, so that the magistrate may furnish him with a remedy and put an end to his misery.

Perhaps even later in Rome, some arrangement of this sort may have at one time existed, for we find the orator Quintilian demanding of the Senate leave to die, as though this was recognized as a natural prelude to lawful suicide. It is probable that such permissions were sometimes granted on inadequate grounds, as Libanius of Antioch, the friend of Julian the Apostate, pokes fun at the practice. Amongst other things he makes Timon the Misanthrope ask leave to commit suicide since, though he is pledged by profession to hate all the world, he can't help loving Alcibiades.

With the decline of the city state and the growth of the Roman Empire, measures against suicides, based either on politico-ethical grounds as at Sparta, or on religious grounds as at Athens, tend to disappear. In Imperial Rome the last, and apparently the only vestige of the latter, survives in the pontifical law. This canonical legislation, whose authority was symbolized in the person of the Pontifex Maximus or chief priest (who in Imperial times was usually the Emperor) laid down that suicide by *hanging* involved both a punishment and an expiation. The former consisted in the

refusal of burial; the fact that a similar privation was the penalty for being struck by lightning, shows the superstitious and non-moral nature of the punishment. The rite of expiation was more curious. On the day when the dead man's children celebrated their yearly remembrance—the *parentalia*—a doll was strung up. The connection of this imitative hanging with religious sacrifices, and more particularly with the swinging festival at Athens, has been shown above. It was a primitive and protective measure.

With this exception, custom and law in Imperial Rome were moved by no anti-suicide prejudices of ethical or religious origin. Where practical and economic issues were not involved, Rome recognized the *liber mori*. However, as time went on, certain developments increased the economic repercussions of suicide, and the right to die became strictly modified for certain classes of people. Suicide *per se*, however, never at any time became a penal offence in Rome; no civil statute declared it to be either a crime or a misdemeanour, and for the general citizen no punishment or penalty attended an unsuccessful attempt. Such legislation as dealt with suicide, approached the subject either from a military or a fiscal point of view. It considered the act not as a crime abstractedly, but rather weighed how far its commission affected the army or the treasury. It is important, however, to notice that to the man in the street, ignorant of the facts and causes, it would appear as though punishment *was* imposed on suicide *per se*. This in its turn would help to strengthen any prejudice against it and reinforce the primitive horror.

For three classes in Italy suicide was punishable—people accused of crime, soldiers, and slaves. In each case it is easy to detect the purely practical and economic causes underlying the deterrent. As to the first class: felony was usually punishable by death and the confiscation of property. Suicide when under arrest thus robbed the treasury of the goods

which would have accrued to it in the case of a conviction, and also secured the suicide's property and chattels for his family. Domitian effectively closed this leak in the revenues by decreeing that those who killed themselves to escape a conviction were without legal successors, and that their goods were to devolve upon the state. Roman justice, however, provided that this penalty should only be applicable in cases where the suicide was accused of a crime which in itself was punishable by confiscation. As a rider to this law we find a note added to the *Digests* to the effect that it is not customary to wear mourning for those who thus kill themselves not *taedio vitae* but *mala conscientia.* (The same also applied to suicide by hanging, but here the basic prejudice was religious.)

That some injustice existed in this law of confiscation is evident, for no loophole was provided for the accused yet *innocent* man who committed suicide. Under Antoninus Pius the law was readjusted to remedy this unfairness. In its final form it allowed the relatives of accused suicides to plead in their defence. If their innocence could be established, the state had no claim upon their property which passed to the natural heirs.

The second class discriminated against were soldiers, and this is perhaps natural, for the state would wish to have an absolute control over its defensive arm. The suicide of a soldier was regarded not as an individual death, but as an action which weakened by a tiny fraction the effective force of the Roman armies and which, if it spread and was encouraged, might easily become a serious menace to the legions. The first reproof of suicide in this connection occurs under the Emperor Marcian, when it is laid down that a soldier who commits suicide is in every way worthy of punishment " unless his act is compelled by weariness of life or the impatience of pain; for he who does not spare himself will hardly spare another ". Excuses such as pain

and weariness of life provided large loopholes, and it is not surprising to find the law restated later with more precision and severity. This change may have been partly stimulated by the growing difficulty of raising voluntary troops from among the native Italians and by the decline of the martial spirit at home. At all events we find Hadrian assimilating suicide to desertion: a departure from life is considered to deserve the same penalties as departing from the standard. In the *Digests* the whole position is finally regulated as follows:

1. The *attempt to commit* suicide for no good reason, or merely to escape from military service, is punishable with death.
2. The *attempt* on grounds of depression, great sorrow, madness, etc., is punishable with dismissal from the service.
3. If the successful suicide takes his life in shame or fear on account of some military misdemeanour, his will is invalid, his goods go to the state, and his name and memory are dishonoured.
4. Conversely, his will is valid if he takes his life for any good personal reason, such as extreme pain, madness, etc. If he has made no will, his goods go to his next of kin or to the Legion.[1]

The last class for whom suicide was illegal were the slaves. In this case, naturally enough, not the Digests of Roman Law, but the anger or clemency of the master appointed the punishment. Usually burial was denied to the dead slave, and he may be supposed to have been thrown into the infamous pits which received the bodies of criminals. The statutes of the famous funerary college or sodality of Lanuvium, drawn up with the approval of the ruling class for a body of very poor men, largely recruited from the slave population, throw an interesting light on this aspect of suicide. They declare that the alumni are not to contribute to the expenses of a funeral for one of their members who

[1] An inscription recording the gift of a free burial ground, is quoted by Adams from *Spons Miscell. Erudit. Antiquitatis.* Discharged soldiers who have hanged themselves are here classed with those who have taken to prostitution.

has committed suicide, *whatever his reasons*. When one considers what a savage punishment non-burial constituted at that time, and what importance certain classes always attach to a "decent funeral", the deterrent effects of such a statute are obvious. By every means in his power the master was determined to secure the use of his slave until a natural death should part them. A slave's suicide might represent considerable financial loss to him and was to be discouraged in every way possible.

On the other hand, it appears that if a slave attempted suicide, his master could not deduct his wages as a punishment. He could only deduct the money which he spent in restoring his slave to health. The legal basis for this leniency Ulpian states as follows: *licet etiam servis naturaliter in suum corpus saevire*. Even the worm has a right to turn against itself. This right, though legally claimed, can hardly have been a social axiom. Symmachus, who bought twenty-nine Saxon prisoners to grace the public games that he was giving in honour of his son, was outraged when they all strangled themselves on the very day of the celebrations. He refers in a shocked way to the "impious hands" that had robbed Rome of her sport. The values involved in this story make it interesting to reflect that Symmachus was one of the finest of the late pagans, and living in the fourth century is said to have embodied most of the old aristocratic and republican virtues.

In another aspect suicide by a slave fell directly under the civil code. The latter decreed for the protection of the master that any slave who killed, or tried to kill, himself within six months of purchase, might be lawfully returned to his former owner, and the transaction declared null and void. Suicidal tendencies were thus classed among the other serious blemishes, such as hidden physical infirmity or a criminal nature, which in a slave were considered good enough reason to invalidate a deed of sale. Rome, altogether

practical, begins and ends its suicide penalties with a strict eye to the main chance. Denarii are at the bottom of their morality; the state treasury and the master's pocket create the criminality of self-destruction.

Classical times gave prominence to another type of suicide —the compulsory suicide—which has a legal and penal aspect. The germ of this compulsory suicide can be traced in the cup of hemlock and the principle that it represented, whereby the condemned took his own life almost with an air of volition. There was to be no wrenching of soul from body. By a sort of sophistry the state was able to disclaim responsibility for death, and evade the attentions of wronged and bitter ghosts. The first use of hemlock to which there is any reference is apparently the cup given to Theramenes, one of the thirty Tyrants, in 403 B.C.; thus when Socrates took it four years later, the custom in Greece was probably still young.

In Imperial Rome the idea of compelling a man to take his own life was abused and extended. It reached its culmination under Nero who, hoping to shift a burden of direct guilt from his shoulders, dispatched numbers of people by this expedient. Among them were Seneca and, virtually, Petronius. The choice of death, or *mortis arbitrium* as it was called, consisted usually of throwing a dagger and sword into the cell where a prisoner was confined, or even of presenting them by polite messenger at a man's villa or dinner table. It is cited as an example of Nero's cruelty that with these gifts went the tacit understanding that they must be employed within the hour. More considerate rulers had been accustomed to allow a day or at worst a forenoon. The tradition of the *mortis arbitrium* has by no means died out; it is a useful device still employed by rulers or governments doutful of the justice of their cause and unwilling to give their opponents a handle for retaliation such as an open execution would provide. Effective use of the *mortis arbitrium* was made in the Nazi

"clean-up" of June 1933, when Heines and others committed "suicide" in their cells. Another milder variant of the same phenomenon, not always resulting in death, is the "confession" of Russian political trials, when prisoners are forced to condemn themselves out of their own mouths.

IV. CATO AND ANTONY

No mention has been made of the two most famous suicides of the Ancient World—Cato and Antony. Opposed in every sense, the contrast of their deaths is illuminating: they stand at opposite poles, representing the philosophic and the profane suicide.

Marcus Portius Cato "Uticensis", great-grandson of the Censor whose reiterated phrase, *delenda est Carthago*, for so many years disturbed the business of the Senate, was born into the revolutionary period which preceded the fall of the Republic. Rarely have the will, the character, and the opportunity, been granted any man as they were granted Cato, to make the facts of his life conform with his own ideal pattern. Among lives that waver and change direction, that calculate their aims upon opportunity, and cancel them with altering circumstance, that have no port and only drift into death, Cato seems almost inhumanly constant. He, if anyone, was impervious to circumstances, troublesome or advantageous; he was, what from the first he had decided to be, a Roman in his own sense of the word: scrupulous, simple, courageous, and above all and through all, absolutely just. Such faults as he had were mostly inherent in the pattern that he had chosen; he would not himself have wished to alter them. To do so would have been in some degree to modify the ideal which he had set himself. He was a man whom history could flatter with plausibility. Sallust wrote:

> He was one who chose to be, rather than to appear, good. He was the very image of virtue, and in all points of disposition

more like to the gods than to men. He never did right that he might seem to do right, but because he could not do otherwise. That only seemed to him to be reasonable which was just. Free from all human vices, he was superior to the vicissitudes of human fortune.

One may question the relevance and practicability of Cato's life at the moment when he lived; its perfection as a pattern, however, and its value as an inspiration to later men, are certain. His life he moulded to a preconceived form, and this form he placed at the service of the Republic in a day when it was threatened by the illicit ambitions of both Caesar and Pompey. His career was consecrated to nothing but this—the maintenance of the liberty of the citizen and, thus, to the preservation of the traditional Roman virtues. Both his tactics and the vehicles through which he chose to work—the old Aristocratic party—can be criticized; Cato himself cannot. The Aristocratic party had no policy, and Cato was not the type of man to create one suitable to the times. A cleverer, quicker witted, more scheming and conciliatory politician, might have played off the opposing dictatorial forces one against the other, and have avoided the final catastrophe. Cato was not a politician. His austerity and integrity were not calculated to win approval; his denunciatory speeches were not oratory. Judged by common standards he was obstinate, short-sighted, and often intolerably rude; yet the obscure wisdom which directed him was not at fault, only by living as he did could he conform to the pattern which he had set himself.

His life is the same as his ideal. They do not diverge, and even Cato the boy fits into the pattern. Plutarch says that even in childhood he "displayed in speech, in countenance, and in his childish sports a nature that was inflexible, imperturbable, and altogether steadfast". Even at that age he inspired among his friends and fellows the same personal devotion which he always aroused later.

When Cato was hauled off to prison from the Senate House, it was this devotion that prompted one of the Senators, as he stalked out angrily after him, to turn to Caesar saying that he preferred to be with Cato in prison than with Caesar in the Senate. Cato first distinguished himself in the fighting against Spartacus; after the operations, however, he refused the prize of valour that was bestowed on him, and thus set a precedent for the rest of his career. No honour did he ever accept, not even the right to wear the purple-bordered robe which a grateful Senate voted him many years later. His dress and habits were in keeping with his modesty; he never rode when he could walk, and to the horror of the *bourgeois* citizens often appeared to transact business barefooted and without his toga. The only indulgence which he allowed himself was the wine he took with his philosophy, for at his country villa he would sit up all night with his friends drinking and discoursing. In a person of so austere and determined a character, who was reputed never to smile, it is pleasant and almost unexpected to find extreme liberality and humane kindness. When he gave up his military tribuneship in Macedonia, men of the legion actually wept, and, sinking on their knees, kissed his hands as he left them. Dio Cassius says that though he was proud and unbending to his enemies, "he loved any one of the common people through pity for his weakness". When the civil war broke out he laid it down as a maxim, with a clemency astounding in those times, that no Roman should be put to death except actually in battle, and that no hostile Roman town should be plundered.

His career as a public man was an exact illustration of his character. As Quaestor he reformed the city's finances and put down bribery; sent on a mission to Cyprus, he subdued the island peaceably and brought intact to the Senate more treasure than Pompey had done in all his triumphs;

forced to assume the tribuneship he combated the demagogic rascality of Metellus Nepos; lastly, to stem the anti-Republican tide he proposed himself consul, and characteristically failed in the elections for the simple reason that he refused to flatter or bribe the electors.

But time was moving on. Despite Cato's exhortations, the Senate quarrelled and wavered. There was little of the old virtue left to which he could appeal, and when in 49 B.C. Caesar crossed the Rubicon, no adequate force could be rallied to oppose him.

Thinking opposition from abroad was the only possible policy, Cato now followed Pompey into Greece. At the victory of Dyrrhachium, which is said to have been largely inspired by Cato's presence among the Republican soldiers, he actually wept when he saw the dead. Far above partisan issues, it was the suffering of Rome that made a settled sorrow rule his face in victory or defeat. Since Caesar's arrival in Italy he had not trimmed his beard nor worn a garland on his head, and subsequent to the battle of Pharsalus he never again reclined at meals in the Roman fashion, but sat, in sign of mourning.

Pompey's defeat left only one hope to the Republicans, a conflict in Africa. Cato accordingly set out for Libya. Having arrived, he made his headquarters at Utica and tried to rally the Republican party. His policy might have brought success, but Scipio's rashness and utter defeat at Thapsus put an end to his hopes. The old virtues, liberty and Republicanism, the things to which he had devoted his life, were dead and not to be resurrected. There remained nothing for him to do but die himself. Cato without his ideals, living in a sycophant and subservient Italy, could have no point or meaning.

> He had been endued by nature [says Cicero] with an austerity beyond belief, and he himself had strengthened it by unswerving consistence, and had remained ever true to his purpose, and fixed

resolve; and it was for him to die rather than look upon the face of a tyrant.

Caesar was now approaching, and perhaps the most touching thing in Cato's impressive life was his solicitude at this moment for his fellow Republicans and for the citizens of Utica. The latter he advised to make their peace with Caesar. When, however, they announced their intention of interceding for Cato, he replied that

> they must make no prayer for him; prayer belonged to the conquered, and the craving of grace to those who had done wrong; but for his part he had not only been unvanquished all his life, but was actually a victor now as far as he chose to be, and a conqueror of Caesar in all that was honourable and just.

His last three days he spent in evacuating the Senators and the Republican forces. Stationing himself at the gate of the city leading to the sea he assigned transports to the troops, many of whom were going on to Spain, supplied stores and provisions to those who were destitute, and with his usual passion for justice, saw to it that the natives were not plundered or abused.

On the last evening of his life he supped with the few friends that could not be persuaded to leave him, chief among them being the philosophers Apollonides and Demetrius, and his own son. After arguing long over the ever-fresh philosophical questions with which they were all familiar, and after counselling his son to retire from politics into the country as there was now no party worthy of a Cato's allegiance, he gave a few necessary instructions and retired to his chamber. There he lay down and began to read the *Phaedo*; chancing to look up, however, he noticed that his sword was not hanging in its proper place on the wall. Suspecting Cato's designs, his son had, in fact, removed it. When a servant, whom he sent, failed to bring it, Cato rose in great anger. Confronting his friends, he taxed them bitterly with trying to alter his fixed intention and with be-

traying those very stoic ideas in which they had always pretended to believe. "When I have come to a resolve," he said, "I must be master of the course which I decide to take." Bursting into tears and speechless, his friends withdrew. Soon the sword was sent to him, carried by a little child. Having tried its point, he laid it down and returned to Plato's dialogue on the soul. He is said to have read it through twice, before falling into a sleep so deep that those outside heard his breathing. About midnight he called for Butas, one of his freedmen, and sent him down to the sea to find out if all had set sail according to plan. Hearing that the embarkation had gone off successfully, but that a heavy storm was raging with a high wind, Cato "groaned with pity for those in peril at sea, and sent Butas down again, to find out whether anyone had been driven back by the storm and wanted any necessaries".

Such consideration for his friends was typical, and particularly touching since the night of his own death was already far gone.

> And now the birds were already beginning to sing, when he fell asleep again for a little while. And when Butas came and told him that the harbours were very quiet, he ordered him to close the door, throwing himself down upon his couch as if he were going to rest there for what still remained of the night. But when Butas had gone out, Cato drew his sword from its sheath and stabbed himself below the breast.[1]

Death did not come at once. His over-zealous friends again tried to save him; and again their efforts were thwarted by Cato himself. Hardly was this Roman dead before the whole people of Utica had assembled.

> With one voice they called Cato their saviour and benefactor, the only man who was free, the only one unvanquished. And this they continued to do even when word was brought that Caesar was approaching. But neither fear of the conqueror, nor a

[1] Plutarch.

desire to flatter him, nor their mutual strife and dissension, could blunt their desire to honour Cato. They decked his body in splendid fashion, gave it an illustrious escort, and buried it near the sea, where a statue of him now stands sword in hand. Then they turned their thoughts to their own salvation and that of their city[1]

Such, briefly, was the life and death of Cato of Utica. Rare among men he lived as he had intended; and died as he had lived. His death is a classic example among considered suicides. Gravely and sanely undertaken, it was the result not of passion, circumstance, or weakness, but of a certain philosophical upbringing shared by many men of his time, and of a way of life common to himself alone. It is in the " high Roman fashion ".

It would be hard to find a greater contrast than that provided by the lives of Cato and Marc Antony. Antony, with his shapely beard, broad forehead, and acquiline nose, an adept in the Asiatic style of oratory, proud to be called " Philathenian ", affecting a dress like Herakles, and driving around the Italian countryside with a yoke of lions in his chariot: Cato, unattractive looking, forceful and bald as a speaker, proud to own no other title than " Roman ", ascetic in habit, simple in dress and carriage. Fastidious in his friends, Cato knew only honest men. Antony, on the other hand, knew anyone who would amuse him, great and small, good and bad, and, as Cicero says, " often went about Italy at the head of pimps, prostitutes and buffoons ".

Cato never gave a thought to his future, but valued infinitely his good name; Antony, led by a world-wide ambition, cared not a jot for his reputation. Cato was just, Antony unjust both in his astounding liberalities and in his punishments (in this context, the murder and mutilation of Cicero are unforgivable). Cato was hardly capable of physical passion; Antony was a womanizer. The antitheses can be numbered indefinitely, for they only seem to have

[1] Plutarch.

shared courage and the ability to inspire devotion. Yet every comparison is unfair to Antony. There is a certain quality in all his actions which is lost in such comparison, but which throws a light and brilliance over his whole life. This quality will not allow him to be dull, petty, or predictable, residing in his caprice as much as in his courage, in his licentiousness as much as in his magnanimity, it makes everything that he does dramatic, poetic, and important. This is the indefinable quality that attracted Shakespeare and that makes Cleopatra say on his death:

> . . . Young boys and girls
> Are level now with men; the odds is gone,
> And there is nothing left remarkable,
> Beneath the visiting moon.

Standing so far apart, not even their suicides will unite these two men: there is only the link of a weapon between the cool, philosophical end of Cato, based on belief, and the passionate suicide of Antony. The latter does in fact exemplify a new type. Self-conscious and self-pitying, jesting and introspective, in disaster alternatively gay and melancholic, Antony seems like a Renaissance figure, and his death is of a sort that becomes familiar only with the Renaissance. Suicide that springs from one ruling passion, and the blankness that supervenes when that passion is thwarted by man or death, is not natural to classic times. The balance of the Roman world, the shrewd poise of the enemy Octavius, the caution of a Cicero, were not conducive to this sort of self-destruction. The Roman was a social animal and he rarely forgot that he was a Roman citizen; Antony never remembered it. It is this lack of a sense of proportion, of social and human dynamics, that hopelessly alienates him from men of the old Republican type. Not only was passionate suicide unusual, but when this passion, like Antony's, was love, the case became rare, anomalous, a matter for wonder. His contemporaries thought his conduct inexplicable. Passionate

love was to them a limited affair with known and compassable objectives. Where was Cleopatra's attraction, since (as Plutarch astounded and uncomprehending, says) she "was superior to Octavia neither in youthfulness nor beauty"? The psychological complexity of Antony's passion, strange to the old world, but not surprising to us, altogether escaped them. At Actium his fleet simply would not believe that he had left an empire for a woman. Besides his ships, they knew that he could count on nineteen undefeated legions and twelve thousand horse, and for seven days his infantry waited, disregarding Caesar's messengers, and believing that he must return. Only on the eighth day, when Canidius, their general, had fled, did his devoted troops in bewilderment go over to Octavius.

There is a self-consciousness about Antony's relations with Cleopatra which makes it seem almost as if he knew that he was creating something unparalleled. There is a tendency to dramatize himself, to fix the new complexity of this passion on his own and the world's memory. Love is not what Rome thinks; it has to do with more than the Senate ever imagined, and not least with all sorts of colours, shapes, tastes, verses, gold, and music. He is willing to give his life to prove it; in fact he can do nothing else, since love now stretches so far and embraces so much that there is no evading its orders. This lover sees himself; and, as people find who watch their own actions, all he does seems both curiously sweet and strangely melancholy. Like the first romantic, Antony labels Cleopatra and himself *The Inimitable Livers*, and when fortune changes he as solemnly hangs out a new flag, inaugurating the society of *The Partners in Death*. Intensely passionate, yet complex, Antony sees the pathos of his own situation; he even sees that his passion is making history.

The story of Antony's end is well enough known. But there are several passages in Plutarch's account which are

worth noting as they emphasize the mixture of passion, romanticism, and the new complexity to which we have been referring. Taken on board Cleopatra's vessel as she scudded away from Actium, Antony "neither saw her, nor was seen by her. Instead, he went forward alone to the prow and sat down by himself in silence, holding his head in both hands". And there he sat for three days without stirring and always in the same posture. Arrived in Africa, he sent Cleopatra forward into Egypt, but he himself wandered off along the Libyan coast, roaming from place to place in solitude, and shelving concrete issues. With him went only two friends, one of whom was that Lucilius who tried to save Brutus's life at Philippi. When at last he did reach Alexandria he

> forsook the city and the society of his friends, and built for himself a dwelling in the sea at Pharos, by throwing a mole out into the water. Here he lived an exile from men, and declared that he was contentedly imitating the life of Timon, since, indeed, his experiences had been like Timon's; for he himself also had been wronged and treated with ingratitude by his friends, and therefore hated and distrusted all mankind.

Here is the ruler of half the Roman world behaving like a creation of Lamartine's. There is this difference, however: where his passion is involved he does not experience a moment's hesitation; he becomes a man of action again, knowing the precise moment when to leave Octavia, when to turn his back on a fleet and empire. Probably in the Libyan wanderings and the Alexandria solitude, for the first time he faced up to the price that he must pay for the new complexity of his love. Everything was demanded of him; in return he got not merely a fascinating and selfish woman's doubtful fidelity, but the romantic's realization of his own sacrifice, and his own realization of the greatness of his passion.

Having promised his enemies the price of his love, his mood changed. He was now decided. His passion was him-

self, and both should be wound up in a fit manner. The right note must be struck, and the pageant maintained. To the last minute he would watch the course of the strange new disease that he had created. His troops melted away, Herod went over to Octavius, and at last only Egypt remained to him. Now, however,

> none of these things greatly disturbed him, but, as if he gladly laid aside his hopes, that so he might lay aside his anxieties also, he forsook that dwelling of his in the sea . . . and after he had been received into the palace by Cleopatra, turned the city to the enjoyment of suppers and drinking bouts, and distribution of gifts. . . .

Cleopatra and Antony now dissolved their famous society of *Inimitable Livers*, and founded another not at all inferior to that in daintiness and luxury and extravagant outlay, which they called the society of *Partners in Death*. For their friends enrolled themselves as those who would die together, and passed the time delightfully in a round of suppers. From such a supper Antony passed on to death in close and dedicated pursuit of his passion.[1] Cleopatra, he thought, had committed suicide; he would, therefore, follow her in

[1] Athenaeus says that Antony once had himself proclaimed as Bacchus throughout the towns and cities of Greece. He also used sometimes to wear the dress of the God, and it was popularly supposed that Bacchus was his tutelary deity. On the night prior to the last engagement when Antony's fortunes were finally lost, a wild, gay, unearthly music was heard passing across Alexandria. The sound moved out through the city's eastern gate directly towards the camp of Caesar. People said that it was the dancing rout of the God, who that night deserted Antony for ever. The idea is used by the modern Greek poet, Cavafy, and provides the necessary excuse to quote a very fine poem:

THE GOD ABANDONS ANTONY.

When at the hour of midnight
an invisible choir is suddenly heard passing
with exquisite music, with voices—
Do not lament your fortune that at last subsides,

this, as he had followed her from Actium. Brought dying to her monument he was conscious of himself and his role up to the last moment. She was not

> to lament him for his last reverses, but to count him happy for the good things that had been his, since he had become most illustrious of men, had won greatest power, and now had not been ignobly conquered, a Roman by a Roman.

Antony's greatness rests in the empire of the passion for which he has so often been reproached. His suicide is the classic example of dedication to such a passion. Of Cleopatra, shrewd and scheming, one cannot say as much; Dio Cassius suggests that she pretended death, knowing that Antony would commit suicide on receipt of the news and that thus she would be in a better position to negotiate with Octavius. Her own suicide, though characteristically well-staged, is impressive only in Shakespeare's handling of it. It appears that she really died, not to join Antony, but to spare her vanity the humiliation of a Roman triumph.

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your life's work that has failed, your schemes that have proved illusions.
But like a man prepared, like a brave man,
bid farewell to her, to Alexandria who is departing.
Above all do not delude yourself, do not say that it is a dream,
that your ear was mistaken.
Do not condescend to such empty hopes.
Like a man for long prepared, like a brave man,
like to a man who was worthy of such a city,
go to the window firmly,
and listen with emotion,
but not with the prayers and complaints of the coward
(Ah! supreme rapture!)
listen to the notes, to the exquisite instruments of the mystic choir,
and bid farewell to her, to Alexandria whom you are losing.

Translation: GEORGE VALASSOPOULO.